

## **Practical Steps for Implementing a VOM Program**

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### **Doing your Homework**

1. How can VOM happen within the context of the existing justice system?
2. Who are the key people who need to be accepting (not necessarily supporting) a restorative approach, generally, and VOM specifically?
3. Become informed about what is already happening in the local justice system that is potentially (or fully, or partially) restorative in intent or practice.
4. As you meet with local justice system people to discuss RJ/VOM, make the connections between what they are already doing and how VOM fits into this. Also identify how this could add to, or enhance their efforts (For example: providing a specific resource that gives victims a greater voice and more active participation in finding satisfactory resolutions.)
5. 3# and #4 are crucial when the effort to introduce VOM comes from outside the criminal justice system (a community generated initiative).
6. Look honestly at whether the timing is right for starting a VOM program in your community. Assess the amount of groundwork that needs to happen prior to beginning such a push.

### **Community Readiness**

7. Consider what is already happening in the community: its interests, its focus at this time. Too many initiatives dilute resources, energy, interest. Is starting a VOM too overwhelming to undertake at this time? What are the “hot spots,” the issues, that could create reluctance to pursue VOM?
8. Recognize the “character” of your community. What will it accept? What needs to be done to create openness? How can VOM/RJ be legitimately framed for community interest?
9. Implications of #7 and #8: Are there opportunities to move forward (grant funds that can be applied for, state interest?). You need to bring together a small focus group that would begin to explore community readiness. The group needs to be connected to the community so they bring a clear perspective of the community.

## **Finding a Champion and Funding**

10. Assuming the community is ready for the introduction of a VOM program, there will need to be someone sponsoring/funding the initiatives so there is an opportunity to create practical experience. *Funding* is a key issue at this point. No matter how good the idea there is competition for limited resources. Having the strong support and commitment of *a key system person* is also critical. If no one is championing this new endeavor, it will almost certainly struggle and likely fail.
11. The folks advocating for this new program must either bring the money for VOM or be a route the money can flow through (e.g. private foundation grant). Either way the VOM advocates must have a willingness to play an active role in securing the needed funding.

## **Establishing the Program**

12. Advocates for the VOM program need to bring with them, or recruit, qualified staff to actually run the program; staff that understand the difference between VOM and community mediation or family mediation.
13. Do groundwork with line staff and managers in the justice system.
  - education/awareness
  - framing VOM as a resource not an added burden
  - collaboratively create referral protocols
  - build strong working relationships: relate, relate, relate
14. Establish VOM case management protocols
15. Train VOM mediators/mentors
16. Start with “easy” cases (victims are often very underserved in these matters); cases that don’t have a high profile or raise concerns (diversions, property offenses). Establishing a “track record”: credibility is important. In the words of a Restorative Justice advocate, David Gustafson, “Dig deep and well”.